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EDITORIAL NOTES

The Science of Education

The educational world has been waiting for some scientific man or other to supply the necessary facts on which to base the "new education." Sometimes it is the psychologist who has seemed to be the most promising source of this much-dreamed-of reform. With an eagerness almost pathetic, teachers have rushed to the various psychologies and have read them in the hope of finding there the solutions of their school problems. The reaction has often been as violent as the first enthusiasm. The psychologies do not solve school problems and the teachers discovering this have complained bitterly against the writers of books on psychology. Sometimes the biologist has been consulted. If we could only find out how nature brings up young animals, if we could only know the formula of evolution by which animal life has been raised from the lower to the higher forms, then surely we should have an answer to our questions of school reform. But here again the teacher is confronted by the result that the school must be different from the playground and that the problems of social heredity differ from the problems of physical heredity. The biologist cannot solve with his formulas the problem of the schools.

The trouble in all these efforts to borrow a science of education is that the field of educational activity is a special field and requires special research. Educators cannot evade the problem by going to specialists in other fields. There must be a direct attack upon the problems of education by students of education. If we wish to teach spelling well why should we wait until the psychologist in the midst of his various discussions drops a few remarks here and there which will be applicable to our problem? Why should we not rather organize a direct investigation of spelling? If oral reading is a problem, why not take it up? We may go to the biologist and the psychologist and the sociologist and the student of all the related sciences for suggestions, but we can never deal with these problems until we take them up as distinct problems worthy of the energies of well-trained students.

Why has there been such delay in the development of a science of education? Because educators have been such busy folk dealing with the problems of classroom management and schoolroom organization. Curiously enough the leaders in practical education have been taken by their duties farther and farther away from the problems of educational research. The principal or superintendent chosen because of his ability as a teacher has been set doing clerical work and solving financial problems rather than studying education. The high school specialist, and above all the college professor, absorbed in their special lines of study, have never had time to consider themselves and their activities as suitable subjects for investigation. We are all disposed to think of everything except our own activities as suitable matters for scientific examination. The world examined scientifically the remote objects of nature before developing a science of physiology or sociology or psychology. And so the educator has been a close student of everything except his own activities as an educator.

It is time for a concerted movement in the direction of a special science of education. The time has come in our institutions of scientific research when there is a career for the student of educational problems. The time has come when teachers are sufficiently critical so that they can begin to appreciate genuine scientific discussions. Let us mark this new era as the era of a definite and distinct science of education which is to supersede all unsystematic borrowings from related sciences and all helpless waiting for someone else to do the task so obviously at hand for those interested in education.